

An Essay  
on  
The Physician & his duties,  
Respectfully submitted to the  
Faculty  
of the  
Homoeopathic Medical College  
of  
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By  
George William Demott,  
Boston of Mass.

## The Physician & His duties.

The word Physician is defined in "Dwight's Dictionary" as follows, "One who has received his Degree from an incorporated Institution as Doctor of Medicine." It is the intention of the writer to indicate as far as the limits of this paper will permit, what in his judgement, the Physician ought to be in addition to what the above definition expresses.

In order to do this it will be proper to state what the motives for becoming a Physician should be; the qualifications requisite; the

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relations he sustains to the public & to his patients  
& lastly, what his character should be.

There is not a more important era in the existence of a man, than the time when it becomes necessary for him to select for himself the profession, with which for the remainder of his life he expects to be identified: - it will be well if he gives the subject careful consideration; that man who contemplates entering the medical profession needs particularly to weigh the matter & its consequences, before he takes his first lessons in the science. He should not enter it by the advice of friends, if that advice conflicts with his own desires, or because advantages of a superior character are at his command; & in fact not at all, unless he is really interested in the noble work; he must feel a desire to do something better, than

merely to reap the pecuniary benefit which may accrue to him:— the desire to relieve human suffering should occupy a prominent place in the list of reasons. The many sacrifices of comfort & social enjoyment to which he is likely to be subjected are to be duly thought about, & he must determine that he still feels sufficient love for the profession to pursue it in earnest, with the express intention of devoting his whole time & best energies to the acquisition of that knowledge, which cannot be dispensed with by those who expect or hope to be successful.

The fact that the degree of M.D. has been conferred on a person who has been pursuing the study of medicine, may be taken as good evidence that he has acquired some knowledge of the principles of the science; but the studi-

are not to be laid aside at this point, as if there were no farther need of them; the truth is that he now has opened to him a wider field, in which to gather from experience that "best of teachers" when the learner begins with correct ideas) new stores of information: he should remember that the study is indeed; every individual case to which he is called, will present symptoms peculiar to itself, although the general outlines of the disease under which his patient labors, will resemble many others still as constitutions, temperaments, habits of living & other surrounding circumstances vary, so must every case of disease be modified; the arranging of classes of disease & directing any special treatment for all that are embraced in a particular class being entirely arbitrary: it is the duty of the practitioner to give each case his careful attention, in order to distinguish these peculiarities

and conduct the treatment accordingly; while doing this, though it must claim a large share of his time & thoughts, he must not forget the alphabet of the science:— I would have his library small & well selected, rather than large & ill conditioned; filled, however small it be, with books that may be of practical use, instead of such as merely make a show; a few standard works on all the different branches, (such as were used during the preparatory course just finished,) should be kept on his table for reference & study during his leisure hours, & these will not be wanting; if this be not done the intimate knowledge, he may have gained in his pupillage will be lost in some of its complex portions at least; when however the more important parts are once fixed in the memory, very little study is necessary to bring the whole before him as

clearly as ever. — It is not or at least it ought not to be supposed that any can become well enough informed on these subjects, to drop the study of them at once & forever on taking his degree, & though the people about him may consider him fully competent to discharge all the duties of his calling, the idea that he is still a student should be carried in his mind through life.

It becomes necessary for the physician to visit not only the wealthy & those comfortably situated, but the distressed & miserably poor; he should attend the calls of the latter as readily as those of the former; — all he needs to know, is the fact that a fellow-being is suffering & requires his aid.

Again the family of the laborer or poor man, should receive as faithful care, as that of the "millionaire"; the inhabitants of the hovels

are not less human than those of the palace,  
& equally claim attention.—I remember being,  
not long since, in conversation with a practitioner, I am sorry to be obliged to say that he is a Homeo-  
pathist now doing business in Philadelphia,  
who remarked to me that he had refused to at-  
tend a great many poor people, because the  
wealthier would not employ him if they knew  
he answered such calls:—I think it a disgrace  
to Homeopathy that it has among its advocates  
those who entertain no higher views of the ob-  
jects of the "healing art"—it is no sin for a man  
to be poor, provided he is honest & industrious;  
in that poverty he all the more needs our  
aid & sympathy:—if the presence of the poor  
prevent the coming of the rich to the office,  
they may be visited at home, rather than refuse  
attendance, it being infinitely better to

accumulate less wealth, than to allow the desire for the patronage of the rich, to obliterate every tender feeling from the breast; before the calls of the suffering all distinctions of wealth & station vanish, & he who is unwilling to do a fellow mortal service for humanity's sake is unworthy the name of a man:— Nor is this all,— professional advice may not be the only thing needed—the poor may be suffering from absolute want of the common comforts of life, or it may be, the means at their disposal are through ignorance misused;— such an outlay of money as his purse will permit in the first instance, & kind, judicious advice in the second, are demanded of the physician.

The physician, as much for his own success & advancement as the comfort of his patients, should be a gentleman in the fullest sense of the

word: - it should be his earnest endeavor to  
serve an unruffled temper in all cases & under every  
variety of circumstances: - the power to do so  
can be acquired only by constant watchfulness  
a rigid course of training, but it is with this as  
with the opposite, the more practice there is given  
to it the nearer the approximation to perfec-  
tion; that is, the more one allowz himself to be  
coarse & unmannerly the more brutish he becomes,  
& the more he cultivates elegance of manners the  
more accomplished he will become: - I know  
that there are many things to annoy - the dis-  
rections left for the management of the sick, - in-  
specting the diet, medicine &c may not have been  
properly attended, or the friends may have a mul-  
tiplicity of questions to ask, or may endeavor to  
force their own opinions with regard to the  
treatment or regimen of the patient, into

the Physician's notice:- These things are well calculated to irritate & betray one into the use of language & tones such as would ever after be regretted, unless the discipline that has been mentioned is faithfully tried.

It is of infinite importance, I should rather or say it is indispensable, that the attendants on the sick be cheerful, while in the room at least; this remark applies especially to the physician - during his visits he should vanish as much as possible from his thoughts, every thing that might tend to leave traces of trouble & care depicted in his countenance; his features will be carefully studied & everything which may have the appearance of anxiety, will at once be taken by each patient, as indicative of the danger attending his particular case, & if it not unfrequently happening, the excitement

which such a conclusion has caused, will prevent to a considerable extent the proper operation of the remedial agents employed; - on the other hand cheerfulness may either direct the thoughts of the patient away from himself, or inspire him with so much confidence, that the state of the mind will be such as to cease to exert any depressing influence, after the first visit.

Presence of mind as it is termed is also a valuable characteristic in the physician, & it should be cultivated, as he will be called many times to visit patients, when all the people to whom he would most naturally look for aid, will be in such a state of excitement that they can render no services of value; the recovery or death of the patient may be almost wholly dependent on the firm

ness he possesses; as the least wavering on his part will only add to the confusion, while an exhibition of self-control, will inspire all with confidence.

A few words with regard to the treatment of disease & we will pass to another part of our subject; in the choice of a mode of treatment the physician should use his own judgement; unbiassed by the prejudices of people outside of the profession; if he has a fair share of knowledge & takes "Similia Similibus Curantur" for his guide, the only sensible law of cure the world has ever yet known called by another "One of God's eternal truths" a title which it merits beyond a shadow of doubt, as many more would acknowledge if they dared to think for themselves, instead of clinging so tenaciously to the accumulated errors of past ages) he will rarely fail to be successful.

There are some men in the profession calling themselves Homoeopaths, with whom I am entirely out of patience; a portion of them are in the habit of consulting the preferences of the patient, in a choice between the "Homoeopathic" treatment & the Allopathic, employing the one or the other, not from the belief that it suits the case best, but because it suits the peculiar notions of the person under treatment: others cannot rest contented unless they mix drugs (the case of an individual residing in the State of New York is too well known by most Homoeopaths to make it necessary to adduce proof of the last statement) I believe that the physician has no right to trifl[e] thus with the sick, & I doubt also his right to deceive the public; his duty then is clearly manifest: if he adopts a certain name & subscribes to a certain law of cure he must do so in good faith, & adhere to it in practice.

One duty which is quite as important as any already considered, must not be passed by without a brief notice at least. Whatever the physician learns either by accident or in his examinations, with regard to the private affairs of his patients, should be kept a profound secret; even when on oath, in a court of justice, he should not allow the fear of imprisonment for contempt, nor the most strenuous endeavors of the prosecutor, to draw from his lips any thing that in his judgement the world at large has no right to know. I think the promise to "tell the truth" does not embrace matters of this character, or if it does, then I doubt the right of courts to administer, & of witnesses to take an oath; there is less to be feared from this manner of exposing secrets, than from the habit of gossiping to which some are addicted; of course the physician must guard against such a habit with the utmost care.

It is undoubtedly the duty of every man

in whatever station of life he may be situated, to cultivate the principles of morality; there are few who are so liable to temptation as the physician; his relations to the opposite sex are different from those of any other man; as the amount of confidence reposed in him is greater so are the opportunities for abusing confidence increased: this may furnish many temptations; if ever a man needs the support of well established principles of integrity it is now; if he is still wavering between a life of rectitude & the indulgence of his senses, he will in such trials be likely to fail to do right; if on the contrary he has made the acquisition of a character of sterling worth among his first cares, & highest aims, he can face the danger fearlessly & will pass the strongest temptation by unnoticed.

I purpose to consider, in a special manner, but one or two of the snares, from among the

many) that beset the path of the physician just beginning practice. - It not unfrequently happens that an individual in the form & wearing the guise of a man, but for whose mean & language has no expression) betrays a female who has trusted him & given him her best affections, while he all the time though professing to return a full measure of regard, is making those professions a mask under which to effect the purpose originally designed by him (the gratification of his passions) care less of the fact, that it also involves the ruin of her whom he is deceiving. - the poor unfortunate, knowing full well the "tender mercies of the world," with its finger of scorn ever after pointed at her, the cold look & the curled lip greeting her in her daily walk & her name branded with infamy,) hopes that she may still conceal her condition, comes to tell her story & solicit aid, appealing to the sympathies & urging

her claims for assistance with all her power -  
or it may be that her seducer at the time that he  
is ruining one, is endeavoring to win a companion  
from among the more wealthy - the exposure of  
the circumstances of his case, would put an end  
at once to all hope of success - some active  
measures must be taken to rid him of the ~~sneaking~~  
braver - he does not dare to trust those who  
make a business of attending to such matters, some  
bad management being feared, nor to an  
older physician because he has a reputation  
which he cannot afford to lose & money would  
be no temptation to him - while pondering on  
the subject he calls to mind a young man, who  
for the five or six years since his graduation,  
has been barely able to live on his earnings,  
even by the most rigid economy. Oh! he thinks here is  
a fellow who has no reputation to lose, he has thus far

lived in obscurity - beside this he is sadly in want  
of money; I can apply to him without fear & no doubt  
shall find him ready to engage in this business." Our  
young practitioner is visited, at a time (it happens)  
when the calls for his services are fewer than  
usual: - either of these cases present temptation  
strong enough to overwhelm many a man - our  
friend is in a dangerous position, a moment's hesitation  
may cost him, what should be as dear as life itself,  
his honor - these solicitations should invariably be  
met with a prompt refusal, from which decision no  
outcry or argument should be allowed to move him.  
Applications of a similar character, may be effect-  
ed from another source, by practitioners of every  
age & standing; these will come from married women,  
whose husbands will join in the request -  
I can well imagine why a woman who cannot be  
contented unless she is in the midst of some ex-

citement; for whom the ballroom or theater have more attractions than the home fireside, should desire to be free from such restraints as would prevent the full indulgence in her (misnamed) pleasures - but why women who appear to be sensible on every other subject, should be so far misled as to desire such assistance from her physician is almost unaccountable: those cases must be treated like the others; with an unqualified refusal; it is clearly the duty of the physician not only to refuse to assist but to endeavor to prevent by persuasion the commission of the crime: for crime it is, & not simply because it is condemned by the laws of the land, but because it is a violation of the commonest principles of right. - In a profession holding the important rank that the one under consideration does, it might be supposed that none but highminded honorable men

would be found - unfortunately this is not true - there are those among us wearing the name & claiming the respect due to the physician who do not scruple to perform what honest men would scorn the thought of doing their whole life-business seeming to be the accumulation of "Gold;" it being an object of worship to them rather than any thing else; - a miserly spirit is not right - we will therefore count it neither among the "duties" nor "qualifications" of the physician but among those evils to be sedulously avoided.

The consideration of the habitual use of alcoholic liquors & tobacco, seems to belong to this part of our subject, - I believe that the use of both or either of these articles cannot be too strongly censured; the former totally unfitting a man for the common business of life & the latter whether the single habit is the use of alcohol

this is not all (though the doctrine I advocate is not taught in any of the schools): — there is nothing on the broad earth that is not calculated to remind us of an Almighty Creator if we will but reflect — yet I think there is nothing more subservient to his purpose than the Medical Science — whether the student examines the complex anatomical structure of the human body for the purpose of ascertaining its chemical composition, or the arrangement of its minute particles, or for the purpose of inquiring into the many & varied functions of the different organs; the manner in which motion is performed & the means used to produce it; or studies the digestion of food, its absorption — its conversion into blood, its entrance into the circulation; the transmission of it to a spot where it is needed to repair some wasting tissue & its immediate application to that use.

or tobacco) does nearly as much - in the medical profession the most brilliant intellect, is hardly able to cope with its duties when not at all interfered with by external impressions; all the powers of reflection are required in very many instances; these powers cannot possibly be used advantageously when stupefied, as they must be, by the over-stimulation consequent upon the constant use of these profligate articles; - there is another argument against them that ought, in itself, to be sufficient to abolish the use of them among sensible men; - it is, that drinking alcohol is a disgusting habit & using tobacco is positively vile & filthy - the physician then, must abstain entirely from the use of stimulants & narcotics, if he would not disgrace himself & his calling. —

Thus far, I have only contended that the physician should be a moral man; but I believe

-the heart & circulatory system & its function - the brain & nervous system with the offices performed by them including the senses of taste, sight, hearing, & the contrivances necessary to make these senses useful - the respiratory system with the vocal organs; - the organs of generation & the wonderful function they perform; - the process which is set up to repair a part that has been injured by violence - the progress of disease & recovery; the necessity of certain conditions in the economy of nature that the integrity of the body may be preserved; or notice the living body in full vigor endowed <sup>with</sup> reason & powers of thought able to unlock nature's vaults & store houses of wisdom, he cannot fail if he reflects, to trace fore-thought, design, wisdom, in this adapting of means to ends - he cannot help seeing "God" written in unmistakable characters in every

step of his investigations — A physician ought to be, then, not a moral man simply but a religious one — he has no excuse if he is not — if he is true to the promptings of his nature & the convictions that must be forced upon his mind — if he does not crush out the spark that is implanted in his breast (in common with all human beings) he will become so — of course it is a duty he owes to himself, but he also owes it to his patient, as he will many times have occasion to tender his Christian sympathies to the friends of those who are passing from earthly scenes; a few kind words of Christian consolation may do incalculable good to the departing who already has the fullest confidence in the fatherly care of his Master — but infinitely more useful will it be when he is called to the bedside of those of his fellow beings who have neglected to look after the things that belong to the spirit.

it<sup>is</sup> until disease has begun its ravages & the hour  
of dissolution is rapidly drawing near - still in doubt  
as to the result of his past neglect, having repented it at  
this late hour he appeals to his medical adviser (whom he  
looks up to perhaps as his best earthly friend) for the con-  
firmation of his hopes & the dispersion of his fears  
if his attendant is a man indifferent to such  
matters what he can say will be of no value - if how-  
ever he have a soul filled with the spirit of God, he  
can do much to smooth the pillow of the dying & render  
(what would otherwise be) an unhappy departure com-  
paratively easy - I may be thought an enthusiast  
but I truly believe that the physician can exert  
a power second to none on earth, not even to him  
whose whole life is devoted to the teaching of religion,  
having in the nature of things a strong hold on the  
confidence of his patient, such as the minister can  
not possibly acquire & gaining it by a means that the

minister cannot bring to bear - Is it objected that a physician if called to visit men of every creed & denomination which will render it difficult to make religion the subject of conversation - I reply that on the essential points all true christians must agree & the necessity of urging any particular creed is thus obviated but if the objection held good it does not alter the physician's duty at all - he is bound in any event to be a Christian.

I have now arrived at the point that was designated in the beginning as "the limits of his paper" it has been written & presented with the full consciousness of the fact that a great subject has been barely touched upon & also that short as this essay is it is long enough to have a great many faults - what has been written however is a faithful transcript of the views of the writer, roughly delineated it is true, without any pretension to artistic skill - Not a

little comfort is derived from the thought that in  
the close confinement that may await these pages  
the views expressed cannot possibly do harm in the  
world & as (according to Dr Duglison) a thesis is  
"never regarded by the preceptor or others" after its  
first examination is over, it is hoped that this,  
honored by a reception, will rest in peace in the  
Archives of the author's Alma Mater.